

## On Parkland anniversary, Biden calls for tougher gun laws

Associated Press

**TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP)** — Sorrow reverberated across the country Sunday as Americans, including President Joe Biden, joined a Florida community in remembering the 17 lives lost three years ago in the Parkland school shooting massacre. "In seconds, the lives of dozens of families, and the life of an American community, were changed forever," Biden said in a statement released Sunday. The president used the occasion to call on Congress to strengthen gun laws, including requiring background checks on all gun sales and banning assault weapons.

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In this Feb. 15, 2018 file photo, people comfort each other as they sit and mourn at one of seventeen crosses, after a candlelight vigil for the victims of the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, in Parkland, Fla.

Associated Press



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## On Parkland anniversary, Biden calls for tougher gun laws

Continued from Front

There was no time to wait, the president said. "We owe it to all those we've lost and to all those left behind to grieve to make a change. The time to act is now."

Gov. Ron DeSantis ordered flags be lowered to half staff from sunrise to sunset across the state to honor those who perished when a former student of Marjory Stoneman Douglas opened fire on campus with an AR-15 rifle on Valentines Day in 2018.

When the gunfire ended, 14 students and three staff members were dead, and 17 others were wounded. The suspect, Nikolas Cruz, is still awaiting trial.

In his proclamation for a



**In this Feb. 18, 2018 file photo, people light candles at a makeshift memorial outside Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, where 17 students and faculty were killed in a mass shooting days earlier in Parkland, Fla.**

Associated Press

day of remembrance, DeSantis asked fellow Floridians to pause for a moment of silence at 3 p.m. Sunday. "The Parkland community is resilient in the wake of trag-

edy, reminding us just how strong and united Floridians can be in the face of such devastating loss," the governor said in his proclamation.

The Republican governor also noted some of the school safety measures enacted since the tragedy three years ago, including money to install panic alert systems at schools across the state and to strengthen programs meant to prevent violence before they occur.

The panic alert measure was dubbed "Alyssa's Law," in honor of 14-year-old Alyssa Alhadeff, one of the students killed three years ago.

Parkland parents have been divided over how lawmakers should respond. Ryan Petty, whose daughter Alaina was 14 when she was killed in the shooting, addressed the president in a tweet Sunday.

"Mr. President, thank you for remembering the loved ones taken from us 3 years ago," he wrote. "Alaina loved this country and the freedoms it guarantees. Common sense tells us that honoring her life does not require infringement on the rights of law-abiding citizens."

In an interview Sunday, Petty said the president's proposals won't prevent more tragedies.

"It's wrong to focus on the weapon," said Petty, who is now a member of the state school board. "For those who understand what happened that day, there were mistakes. This was the most preventable school shooting in the history of our country. The warning signs were there. It was clear the killer had intentions to attack the school."

Petty remembered his daughter as a friend to everyone, and recounted how important community service was to her.

"For those of us who lost loved ones that day, it's pretty much like any other

day. We miss them. There's nothing we can do to bring them back. The only thing we can do is move forward and try to honor their memories and make sure this doesn't happen to any other families," he said.

But critics of the governor and Republican-controlled Legislature say guns are too easily accessible and say more needs to be done to keep assault-style guns away from potentially bad actors.

"The passage of time has done little to heal the heartbreak we felt upon hearing the shocking news three years ago today, nor dulled our sense of outrage at the lack of consequential legislative action from lawmakers since that horrible morning — laws that would prevent another Parkland from ever happening again," said Manny Diaz, the chair of the Florida Democratic Party.

Over the years, deadly violence targeting schools has shaken the nation — including the Virginia Tech shootings in 2007 that claimed 32 lives and the Sandy Hook Elementary School massacre in 2012. Even before the Parkland tragedy, there was already plenty of anguish in Florida over gun violence. Less than two years before, another gunman shot up the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, killing 49 people.

None of the deadly events produced comprehensive gun laws. Mass shootings have galvanized gun control advocates, who have been met with resistance from Republican lawmakers and their 2nd Amendment allies. It remains to be seen what will be done on the federal level, despite Democratic control of the White House and both chambers of Congress. □



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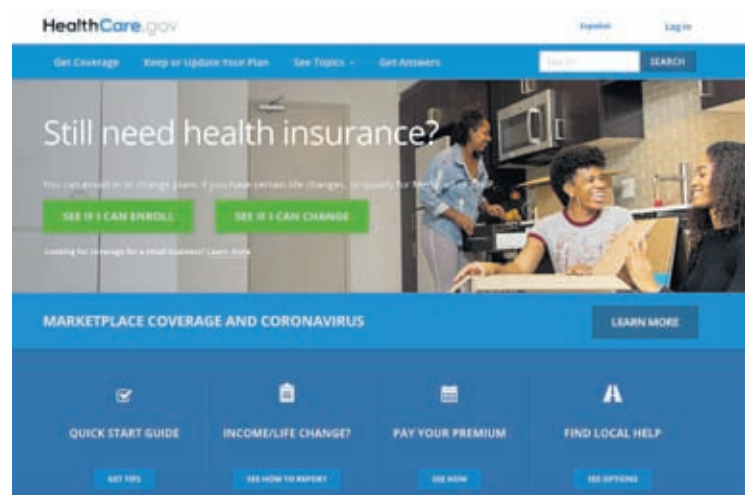
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# 'Obamacare' sign-ups reopen as Democrats push for more aid



This screen grab from the website shows the main web page for the HealthCare.gov.

Associated Press

By RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) —

HealthCare.gov's market for subsidized health plans reopens Monday for a special three-month sign-up window as the Democratic-led Congress pushes a boost in financial help that could cut premiums by double digits.

This enrollment period during the coronavirus pandemic is an early test of President Joe Biden's strategy to use the Affordable Care Act as a springboard toward health coverage for all. Advancing on a parallel track, the new COVID-19 relief bill from House Democrats would offer a generous, though temporary, increase in subsidies for people covered by the law known as "Obamacare." "It is a hugely important signaling move,"

said Katherine Hempstead of the nonpartisan Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. "The administration is doing more than having open enrollment here, they're saying they want to make this coverage more affordable." While policy experts like Hempstead are taking note, it's unclear how uninsured Americans will respond. Former President Barack Obama's health law has been on the books over a decade, but surveys consistently show that many people lacking job-based insurance do not realize they may qualify. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that about 33 million people are uninsured this year.

At Foundation Communities, an Austin, Texas, nonprofit that serves low-income working people, program director Kori Hattermer says she's seeing an

uptick in interest. Although her agency had not started advertising, appointments for enrollment assistance booked up quickly. Volunteer counselors are being called back.

For clients, "it's their last chance probably to enroll in health insurance for 2021," Hattermer said.

One is Jacklindy Barradez, a housekeeper and restaurant worker unemployed since the start of the pandemic. Her husband hung on to his maintenance job, but the couple and their two children are uninsured. Barradez said a friend told her about the health law and she intends to follow through.

With no health insurance as the pandemic stretches into its second year, Barradez is uneasy. "We are not exempt from having something happen to us," she said in Spanish, her first language. "Not having the means to respond is extremely worrisome."

The Biden administration is going the extra mile to try to sign up people such as Barradez.

HealthCare.gov will be accepting applications through May 15, a period about twice as long as annual open enrollment. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, which runs the program, has a \$50 million advertising budget, five times what the Trump administration would spend on annual open enroll-

ment. Under Biden, there will be a special emphasis on reaching Black and Latino communities that have borne a heavy burden from COVID-19.

Across the country, people in the 36 states served by the federal HealthCare.gov marketplace will be able to apply. Additionally, most states that run their own marketplaces are matching the federal effort, giving it the feel of a national campaign.

The appeal for uninsured people could become much clearer if Congress increases premium subsidies as part of its next virus relief package.

"That would be a great incentive to get people in the door," said Tara Straw, a health policy analyst with the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, which advocates on behalf of low-income people. More generous help would be available not just to the newly enrolled, but to all who are covered through the law's marketplaces.

By the budget center's calculations, a family of four making \$50,000 would pay \$67 a month in premiums for a standard plan, instead of an average of \$252 currently, while also qualifying for help with deductibles and copays. The boost in premium assistance would be available for this year and for 2022.

Similarly, a single person making \$30,000 a year

would pay \$85 a month for a standard plan instead of the current \$195.

The Democratic proposal would allow more solid middle-class households to qualify for financial help. On the opposite end of the scale, those who've experienced unemployment would qualify for extra-generous subsidies.

Republicans who tried but failed to repeal the law under President Donald Trump are calling the Democratic plan a waste of taxpayer dollars. But many Democrats see it as merely a down payment on a more ambitious health care agenda.

The Obama health law now covers more than 20 million people through a combination of subsidized private plans and, in most states, expanded Medicaid.

Experts agree that job losses during the pandemic have led to more uninsured people, but it's unclear how many more. Some estimates range from 5 million to 10 million, while the Congressional Budget Office suggests a lower number, more like 3 million.

Chris Sloan of the consulting firm Avalere Health says it's likely that many who became unemployed in the pandemic had no job-based health insurance to begin with. That means they represent the demographic for which the health law was originally designed. □

# Imprisoned ex-FBI agent who worked with Bulger seeks release

BOSTON (AP) — The former FBI agent serving a 40-year prison sentence for alerting Boston mobster Whitey Bulger that he could be implicated in a murder is seeking to be released from prison on medical grounds. The Florida Commission on Offender Review will hear the request Wednesday from John "Zip" Connolly, who is being held at the Reception and Medical Center in Lake Butler, Florida. "It's on the docket for the 17th and he's seeking a conditional medical release," said commis-

sion spokesperson Angela Meredith. A majority vote would lead to Connolly's release, she said.

Connolly's Cambridge lawyer, Peter Mullane, confirmed to the Boston Herald Friday that Connolly, who is 80, is seeking to be released. "He has multiple melanomas and pretty bad diabetes. Two serious illnesses," Mullane said. Connolly, who was James "Whitey" Bulger's FBI handler, was convicted in 2008 of second-degree murder after a mob hitman killed World Jai Alai President

John Callahan in Fort Lauderdale in 1982. Trial evidence showed Connolly tipped Bulger that Callahan was about to implicate the gang in another killing. Separately, Connolly served nearly 10 years in prison after being convicted in 2002 of racketeering and obstruction of justice for protecting members of Bulger's Winter Hill Gang from prosecution and tipping them about informants in their ranks.

Bulger, who spent 16 years as one of America's most wanted men before be-

ing arrested in California in 2011, was killed in federal prison in West Virginia in 2018.

Connolly's wife and three grown children are still living in the Boston area, Mullane said, and they hope he will be allowed to return to Massachusetts.

"This has been a punishment for the whole family, and they have suffered," Mullane said.

Callahan's wife, Mary, also 80, said she just celebrated what would have been her 61st wedding anniversary. □



In this Oct. 15, 2008 file photo, former FBI agent John Connolly listens to the testimony during his trial in Miami.

Associated Press



# No longer an outlier: New York ends commercial surrogacy ban

By **DAVID CRARY**  
AP National Writer

**NEW YORK (AP)** — To become a father of two daughters, New York state Sen. Brad Hoylman and his husband made cross-country trips to California, where the girls were born through surrogacy arrangements. At the time, New York was one of a handful of states outlawing commercial surrogacy. Now, it's about to become legal after years of activism by Hoylman and a host of allies who finally overcame tenacious political opposition. Instead of being a national outlier, New York will become a leader, according to experts on surrogacy. They say the new law, passed in April and taking effect on Monday, has a surrogates' bill of rights providing the nation's strongest protections for women serving as surrogates. Among the provisions: the right to independent legal representation, a guarantee of comprehensive medical coverage, and the right to make their own health care decisions, including whether to terminate or continue a pregnancy. "We went to California because it had the best laws," Hoylman said. "Now New York has the best law. We think it's a model for other states." The new law allows gestational surrogacy on a commercial basis, involving a



**New York State Senator Brad Hoylman, left, with his husband David Sigal, right, pose with their daughters Lucy Hoylman-Sigal, 3, left, and Silvia Hoylman-Sigal, 10, both born through surrogacy, Saturday Feb. 6, 2021, in New York.**

surrogate who is not genetically related to the embryo. An egg is removed from the intended mother, fertilized with sperm and then transferred to a surrogate — in contrast to so-called traditional surrogacy that involves an egg from the surrogate. The gestational option is welcomed by many LGBTQ people who want to be parents, as well as by couples struggling with infertility. With the change in New York, surrogacy advocates say only Louisiana and Michigan have laws explicitly prohibiting paid gestational surrogacy. Nebraska has no explicit ban, but a

statute there says paid surrogacy contracts are unenforceable. Hoylman, who was the surrogacy bill's lead sponsor in the New York Senate, and his husband, filmmaker David Sigal, made about 10 trips to California between them to help oversee the arrangements that led to the births of their daughters, Silvia, now 10, and Lucy, 3. Gestational surrogacy routinely costs between \$100,000 and \$150,000. Hoylman declined to estimate the total costs incurred by him and Sigal but said, "It was worth every penny." Among the standard costs

are fees for lawyers and the surrogacy agency, the cost of in vitro fertilization, plus compensation and health insurance for the surrogate. Compensation rates vary widely — generally \$25,000 to \$50,000. The first bill seeking to repeal the New York ban was introduced by Assemblywoman Amy Paulin in 2012, the year Hoylman was elected to the Senate. It floundered for years in the face of staunch opposition by the Roman Catholic Church and some feminists, who argued that paid surrogacy led to the exploitation of women. "Under this bill, women in

**Associated Press**

economic need become commercialized vessels for rent, and the fetuses they carry become the property of others," renowned feminist Gloria Steinem wrote to lawmakers in 2019. New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo, who earlier in his tenure pushed hard to legalize same-sex marriage, argued in response that the surrogacy ban was "based in fear, not love" and was especially harmful to same-sex couples. A leading surrogacy expert in California, Parham Zar, says gay couples and single men have constituted about half of his clientele in 20 years as managing director of the Egg Donor & Surrogacy Institute in Beverly Hills. The institute has overseen more than 1,200 surrogacy births during that period, according to Zar, and he now plans to open an office in New York City. Zar says he advises clients to be braced for at least \$100,000 in costs for a gestational surrogacy. The bills can be higher. Andrew Kabatchnick, an accountant from White Plains, New York, says he and his wife, occupational therapist Leah Marx, have spent \$250,000 to \$300,000 on two gestational surrogacy births. Their 2-year-old daughter, Sophie, was brought to term by a surrogate in Alabama; a second baby is due in June via a surrogate in Arkansas. □

## Suspect arrested in fatal stabbings in NYC subway system



**Police patrol the A line subway train bound to Inwood, after NYPD deployed an additional 500 officers into the subway system following deadly attacks, Saturday Feb. 13, 2021, in New York.**

**Associated Press**

**NEW YORK (AP)** — A 21-year-old Brooklyn man was arrested in the fatal stabbings of two people on New York City subway trains, police said Sunday. Rigoberto Lopez was taken into custody Saturday night and was formally arrested Sunday on charges of murder and attempted murder, police said. One of the victims was discovered dead on a train in Queens late Friday with several stab wounds to his neck and torso, police said. Two hours later, a 44-year-old woman was found

stabbed to death in a subway car in upper Manhattan. Two nonfatal attacks — one involving a 67-year-old man and the other involving a 43-year-old man — also occurred in upper Manhattan. Authorities believe all four victims were homeless. Deputy Chief Brian McGee said officers on patrol in the northern Manhattan neighborhood where three of the four stabbings occurred spotted Lopez, who fit the description of the suspect being sought in the attacks, at 6:15 p.m. Satur-

day. The officers brought Lopez to the local police precinct for questioning, McGee said. A knife was recovered from Lopez and will be analyzed to determine whether it was the weapon used in the attacks, McGee said. Police said they believe Lopez may have committed all of the attacks. It wasn't clear if he had an attorney who could speak for him. Police leaders said they would deploy an additional 500 officers into the subway system to guard against future assaults. □



# China fires back at U.S. allegations of lack of transparency

**BEIJING (AP)** — China fired back at the U.S. on Sunday over allegations from the White House that Beijing withheld some information about the coronavirus outbreak from World Health Organization investigators. In a statement on Saturday, White House National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said Washington had “deep concerns about the way in which the early findings of the COVID-19 investigation were communicated and questions about the process used to reach them.”

“It is imperative that this report be independent, with expert findings free from intervention or alteration by the Chinese government,” he said, referring to the WHO mission investigating the origins of the pandemic in the central city of Wuhan, where the coronavirus was first detected late in 2019.

“To better understand this pandemic and prepare for the next one, China must make available its data from the earliest days of the outbreak,” Sullivan’s statement said.

China responded Sunday with a statement from its Washington Embassy that said the U.S. had already “gravely damaged international cooperation on COVID-19” and was now “pointing fingers at other countries who have been faithfully supporting the



The World Health Organization team is briefed outside of the Huanan Seafood Market on the third day of their field visit in Wuhan, China.

WHO and at the WHO itself.”

While it welcomed President Joe Biden’s decision to reverse the Trump administration’s move to leave the WHO, China hopes the U.S. will “hold itself to the highest standards, take a serious, earnest, transparent and responsible attitude, shoulder its rightful responsibility, support the WHO’s work with real actions and make due contribution to the international cooperation on COVID-19,” the statement said.

Following allegations of Chinese withholding of data in The New York Times and other media outlets, investigation team member Peter Daszak tweeted, “This

was NOT my experience on @WHO mission.”

“As lead of animal/environment working group I found trust & openness w/ my China counterparts. We DID get access to critical new data throughout. We DID increase our understanding of likely spillover pathways,” Daszak tweeted.

Another team member, Thea Koelsen Fischer of Denmark, also said that had not been her experience and implied some comments had been misrepresented in the media.

“We DID build up a good relationship in the Chinese/Int Epi-team! Allowing for heated arguments reflects a deep level of engagement in the room.

## Associated Press

Our quotes are intendedly twisted casting shadows over important scientific work,” Fischer tweeted.

The British-born Daszak, a zoologist who now works in New York, affirmed Fischer’s remarks, tweeting: “It’s disappointing to spend time w/ journalists explaining key findings of our exhausting month-long work in China, to see our colleagues selectively misquoted to fit a narrative that was prescribed before the work began. Shame on you @nytimes.”

Daszak had previously worked with the deputy director of the Wuhan Institute of Virology, Shi Zhengli, to track down the origins of severe acute respira-

tory syndrome, or SARS, which originated in China and led to the 2003 outbreak of the disease. He earlier told The Associated Press that the WHO team enjoyed a greater level of openness than they had anticipated, and that they were granted full access to all sites and personnel they requested.

The 10-nation WHO team last week departed Wuhan after nearly a month. It visited markets, hospitals and research centers, including the highly secure Wuhan Institute of Virology that has been the subject of speculation because of its large collection of bat virus specimens.

In their comments while in China, team members said they had some new insights into the origins of the pandemic that has killed more than 2.3 million people, but that major questions are still unanswered.

The mission was intended to be an initial step in the process of understanding the origins of the virus, which scientists have posited may have passed to humans through a wild animal, such as a pangolin or bamboo rat.

They said transmission directly from bats to humans or through the trade in frozen food products are also possibilities, but an alternate theory that the virus leaked from a Chinese lab was unlikely. □

# Protesters say French anti-radicalism law is anti-Muslim

**PARIS (AP)** — Activists rallied Sunday in Paris to demand that the French government abandon a bill aimed at rooting out Islamist extremism that the protesters say could trample on religious freedom and make all Muslims into potential suspects.

French lawmakers hold a key vote Tuesday on the draft law, which is expected to win approval in both houses of parliament. The legislative debate comes amid lingering fears of extremist violence after an Islamic radical beheaded a history teacher and other

recent attacks.

President Emmanuel Macron’s centrist government argues that the bill is needed to protect French values like gender equality and secularism, and to prevent radical ideas from taking root and inspiring violence. But those at Sunday’s protest said France already has legal tools to do this, and that the bill stigmatizes the country’s No. 2 religion even though the majority of French Muslims do not espouse extremist views.

Some described it as a political ploy by Macron to win over conservative

and far-right voters ahead of next year’s presidential election.

“It’s not worth attacking a whole community because one person did a horrible act,” said Zeyneb Bouabidi, a woman from the Paris suburb of Conflans-Saint-Honorine, where teacher Samuel Paty was beheaded in October after showing his class caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad published in satirical newspaper Charlie Hebdo for a discussion about free expression.

Bouabidi described facing occasional discrimina-



An activist holds a placard reading « Freedom guides all people » during a gathering in Paris, Sunday, Feb. 14, 2021.

Associated Press

tion at university and in her jobs because of her Arab-sounding name, and fears laws like this one could make matters worse.

“They make comments like ‘go back to your country.’ But I am in my country! I was born in France,” she said. □



# Firefighters battle Afghan-Iran border blaze for a 2nd day

By **HAMED SARFARAZ and TAMEEM AKHGAR**  
Associated Press

**KABUL, Afghanistan (AP)** — Firefighters struggled for a second day Sunday to battle a massive fire that began when a fuel tanker exploded at a major crossing in Afghanistan's western Herat province on the Iranian border, officials said. At least 20 people were injured and many of the more than 500 trucks lined up at the Islam Qala crossing carrying natural gas and fuel were still ablaze, according to Afghan officials and Iranian state media.

Herat provincial Gov. Wahid Qatali said first responders were quickly overwhelmed Saturday by the huge, out-of-control fire. "When each cylinder was exploding it was flying 100s of meters high," he told The Associated Press.

Two explosions at the border crossing were powerful enough to be spotted from space by NASA satellites. One blast erupted around 1:10 p.m. Afghan time (0840 GMT), the next around a half-hour later at 1:42 p.m. local (0912 GMT). The United States allows Afghanistan to import fuel and oil from Iran as part of a special concession that exempts Kabul from U.S.



Iranian firefighters work on a burning tanker carrying fuel at the Islam Qala border with Iran, in Herat Province, west of Kabul, Afghanistan, Saturday, Feb. 13, 2021.

Associated Press

sanctions against Iran. Satellite photos taken Saturday before the explosion showed dozens of tankers parked at the border crossing.

Qatali said officials were concerned that windy conditions Sunday could fan the flames and spread the fire to even more fuel-laden trucks in the area. He said the government was able to save more than 1,200 trucks.

Herat's chamber of commerce and industries chief Younus Qazizada said the

explosion and fire started when provincial customs employees were inspecting a gas tanker. But an investigation into the cause of the fire continued Sunday.

"If the government would have invested the income of a single day of customs (tariffs) in the firefighting department this chaos wouldn't have happened," Qazizada said.

Iran's semi-official ISNA news agency reported an estimated \$50 million loss of goods and consignments in the catastrophe. Qazizada

estimated the losses were twice that much.

Qatali, the provincial governor, said the investigative team will inspect video footage of the area but Wakil Ahmad Karokhi, a Herat provincial council member, said the customs facility was entirely consumed by the fire.

The fire spread Saturday to the Dogharoon customs facilities on the Iranian side of the border and first responders — including the fire department, the Iranian army and border forces —

were assisting in extinguishing the blaze, according to Iranian state television. The Afghan side of the border crossing has its own fire department, but officials in Herat said they were never in control of the blaze.

Iran sent 15 firefighting units to the Afghanistan side to help. The Islam Qala border crossing is around 120 kilometers (75 miles) west of the city of Herat and is a major transit route between Afghanistan and Iran.

The Afghan government is working on an alternative to resume trade between the two countries, as Afghanistan is mostly dependent on imported goods from neighboring countries. Iran officials say that they will accelerate the custom process at other border crossings with Afghanistan. The fire continued to burn Sunday and the explosions shut down the power grid between Iran and Afghanistan, leaving Herat in the dark, said Wahidullah Tawhidi, spokesman for the Afghan Ministry of Power Supply.

According to ISNA, Iranian authorities allowed 2,000 trucks to move into the Iranian side from Islam Qala to prevent further damage. Seven of the injured were transferred to hospitals inside Iran. □

# Brazil Carnival goes online with street parties banned



A member of the "Desliga da Justica" street band gets dressed in his spiderman costume in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Sunday, Feb. 14, 2021.

Associated Press

By **MARCELO SILVA DE SOUSA and DIARLEI RODRIGUES**  
Associated Press

**RIO DE JANEIRO (AP)** —

Supergirl came out of the dressing room ready for action as usual.

She took her place along-

side Freddy Krueger, Poison Ivy and Captain America and they kicked off, into song.

That idiosyncratic lineup is a typical sort of lineup for the Carnival street band Desliga de Justica, but this year they were facing cameras in a studio and the fans were scattered across the internet instead of dancing in the streets during one of the world's most iconic celebrations.

"Everybody at home, move the furniture out of the way to dance and drink cold beer," called out the woman dressed as Poison Ivy, who began the show with a traditional Carnival song. The COVID-19 pandemic

forced Rio to shut down its famed festival and threaten legal action against those who defy the ban to party. So groups like Desliga — the name is a Portuguese language play on "Justice League" — turned to online events for their backers, streaming music and dances via YouTube and other social media platforms.

This year, all members of the band took a PCR test for coronavirus on Sunday when they arrived at studio in the south of Rio.

"When everyone is immunized, we are going to have the biggest Carnival that Brazil has ever seen. Wait for us until 2022," said

Supergirl, aka Carla de Freitas, 38. "We want everyone to be healthy and protected to have fun in peace". Brazil is still recording an average of more than 1,000 deaths a day from the pandemic and as in many countries, immunization campaigns have been lagging. The Sambadromes of Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo that normally throb with partying this time of year after being used as vaccination stations.

Rio's mayor's office reported that as of Sunday morning, it had closed four nightclubs that broke restriction rules and imposed seven fines for social distancing violations. □



# Women fleeing Burkina Faso violence face sexual assault

By SAM MEDNICK

Associated Press

KAYA, Burkina Faso (AP)

— A 20-year-old woman could no longer live in her village amid the rising violence caused by Islamic extremists. But she needed to return and retrieve the family's cows in hopes of selling them.

If her husband went, jihadists would almost certainly kill him. She went instead, and was dragged into the bush, beaten and raped at knifepoint.

"I screamed, but I couldn't overtake him, so I cried," she recalled in a phone interview from Barsalogho town in the Center North region where she now lives. The Associated Press does not identify victims of sexual violence.

The extremist violence in Burkina Faso linked to al-Qaida and the Islamic State group is fueling an increase in sexual assaults against women, especially those displaced by attacks. Many are preyed upon as they attempt to collect belongings they left behind. The violence killed more than 2,000 people last year, according to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project. It also displaced more than 1 million people.

In Burkina Faso's Center North region, sexual assault



Displaced women prepare food Monday Feb. 8, 2021 in the Kaya camp, 100 kms North of Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.

Associated Press

cases increased from two to 10 during a three-month period last year, according to a report by humanitarian groups including the United Nations. Some 85% of survivors were internally displaced people mainly living in makeshift camps in Barsalogho and Kaya towns, it said.

Women in Kaya told AP they feared being attacked while going to fetch firewood for cooking.

"I won't go more than 4 kilometers (2.5 miles) outside of Kaya to farm because I'm afraid for my safety,"

said Kotim Sawadogo. The 37-year-old fled Dablo in August and struggles to afford food for her four children. In September 2019, her niece was raped by jihadists while farming outside the village, she said.

"They won't be killed but they'll be raped, which is like being killed inside anyway," said Fatimata Sawadogo, who was displaced last year from Dablo to Kaya and knows women who have been raped by jihadists while farming. Women often assume the rapists are jihadists because

they carry guns and wear masks. Sometimes after assaulting the women, the jihadists burn their food, and yet some women are so desperate that they return the next day to salvage it, she said.

Aid groups say jihadists are not the only perpetrators and that there has been an increase in domestic violence and exploitation of displaced women by host communities.

"This reality is made worse by the lack of economic opportunities for women, the shortage of food and

shelter for women and the lack of access to quality health care," said Jennifer Overton, West Africa regional director for Catholic Relief Services.

Earlier this month, a woman in Kaya said she had sex with a community leader twice, in June and November, because he promised he could add her name to a list to receive food. "I regret it, but I thought I'd get food and I never did," she said, who spoke on condition of anonymity for her safety.

Before the violence, Burkina Faso didn't have specialized services focused on sexual assault. Now humanitarians are struggling to cope, said Awa Nebie, a gender-based violence specialist with the United Nations Population Fund.

This year the humanitarian response plan for Burkina Faso estimates that more than 660,000 people will need protection against gender-based violence, Nebie said.

Since August, the organization has created six safe spaces in the Center North to help women and girls speak freely about their experiences, but it's inadequate, she said. And some areas of the country like the Sahel and East regions are hard to access due to insecurity. □

# Regional Catalan vote could confirm separatists' power

By JOSEPH WILSON

Associated Press

BARCELONA, Spain (AP)

Political parties supporting the secession of Catalonia from the rest of Spain seem to be poised to maintain their hold on that regional parliament after an election on Sunday.

A survey of voters conducted ahead of the election published by Catalonia public television as polls closed suggested that the three parties supporting independence for Catalonia may increase their slim majority in the 135-seat Barcelona-based legislature.

The survey by Catalonia's public television based on 8,000 phone calls predict-

ed that the pro-secession Republic Left of Catalonia is to likely win the election with between 36-38 seats. It suggested that the pro-union Socialists would likely come in second with 34-36 seats, followed by the pro-secession Together for Catalonia with 30-33.

Salvador Illa, Spain's health minister until last month, was the leading candidate on the ticket of Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez's Socialist Party. Illa was hoping to end the hold that pro-independence lawmakers have held in the regional parliament for the past decade.

Some 5.3 million people were eligible to vote.

The goal of separatists is to not only maintain their slim majority of the Catalan parliament based in Barcelona, but also try to break the 50% barrier of the popular vote for the first time. The wealthy region, with its own language spoken alongside Spanish, has been the source of Spain's biggest political crisis in decades since separatist leaders failed in a 2017 secession bid in defiance of court warnings that it was unconstitutional. Several of those leaders ended up in prison, while others fled to other European countries.

Virus fears, rainy weather and the relatively calmer political climate com-



A woman working at a polling station set up in a market, is taken the temperature during the regional Catalan election in Barcelona, Spain, Sunday, Feb. 14, 2021.

Associated Press

pared to the last election in December 2017 tamped down on turnout. By 6:00

p.m., turnout was 45% compared to 68% four years ago. □



## MedCare's Fit2Fly COVID-19 Testing Centers: Antigen & PCR-testing in the high-rise area; by walk-in and appointment. At your convenience!

**PALM BEACH — MedCare's Fit2Fly COVID-19 Testing Center is your best option for the post vacation COVID-19 test which is now required by the U.S. before returning home. All passengers coming to the United States, including U.S. citizens, are required to have a negative (antigen or PCR) COVID-19 test result maximum three days prior to boarding the flight, or documentation of recovery from COVID-19. MedCare's testing centers in and close to the hotels provide you with an easy and secure solution. At this moment we are the only lab that offers the more convenient and cheaper Antigen Test!**

MedCare Clinic, a high-quality medical clinic that is specialized in care for tourists and that has been appointed as the national COVID-19 clinic for tourists, and Laboratorio di Servizio, a full-service modern medical laboratory with state-of-the-art equipment, have partnered up to provide fast and reliable COVID-19 testing to all. Laboratorio di Servizio is ISO-15189:2012 accredited by the Dutch Council for Accreditation (M317).

Just steps away from you

The general Fit2Fly COVID-19 Testing Centers are located at the Cove Mall and at the Mill Resort, two locations at a stone's throw from your resort, condominium, or other vacation accommodation. Contact them to make an appointment, or just walk-in when it is convenient to you. It is recommended that the tests are done timely, as the negative test is only accepted if taken up to three days before boarding your flight. MedCare Fit2Fly Testing Center at the Cove Mall is opposite the Holiday Inn and is open every day for walk-ins from 8am through 10pm. MedCare's other location is situated at The Mill Resort, across the street from the RIU Hotel and is open every day from 8:30am until 12:30pm. Naturally, if you wish to arrange an appointment for your tests before coming to Aruba this is also possible by contacting us.



### At your hotel

For a selection of hotels/resorts in Aruba, MedCare has setup Testing Centers on site. The hotels/resorts at which we have a testing site are: Divi All Inclusive, Divi Dutch Village, Divi Golf, Divi Phoenix, Divi Tamarijn, Hilton Aruba Caribbean Resort, Hyatt Regency, Renaissance, and the Ritz-Carlton Resort. Please contact your front desk for more information on our Testing Centers at these properties.



### Costs and timing

Passengers must be tested with a viral test that could be either an Antigen Test or a nucleic acid amplification test (NAAT), such as the reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction (PCR). The costs for the Antigen Test are only \$50, and the PCR Test is available as well, for a higher charge of \$125. At this moment, only MedCare offers the easier and substantially cheaper Antigen Test that is acceptable for travel to the U.S. as per the CDC guidelines. Pre-travel testing is not covered by the Aruban visitor insurance. Please contact your insurance company to verify if testing costs are insured. Results are e-mailed to you within 24 hours of testing.

### Testing at home

We also offer testing at your house/hotel room for a one-time extra fee of \$120. This fee covers testing up to 10 people (one appointment, at one location and a specific time). Additional persons will be charged \$10 per person.

### To book your test in advance, please contact:

Phone: +297 280 0630

Email: [info@medcare.aw](mailto:info@medcare.aw)

For more information on MedCare Testing Centers:

<https://medcare.aw/en/covid-19-testing>

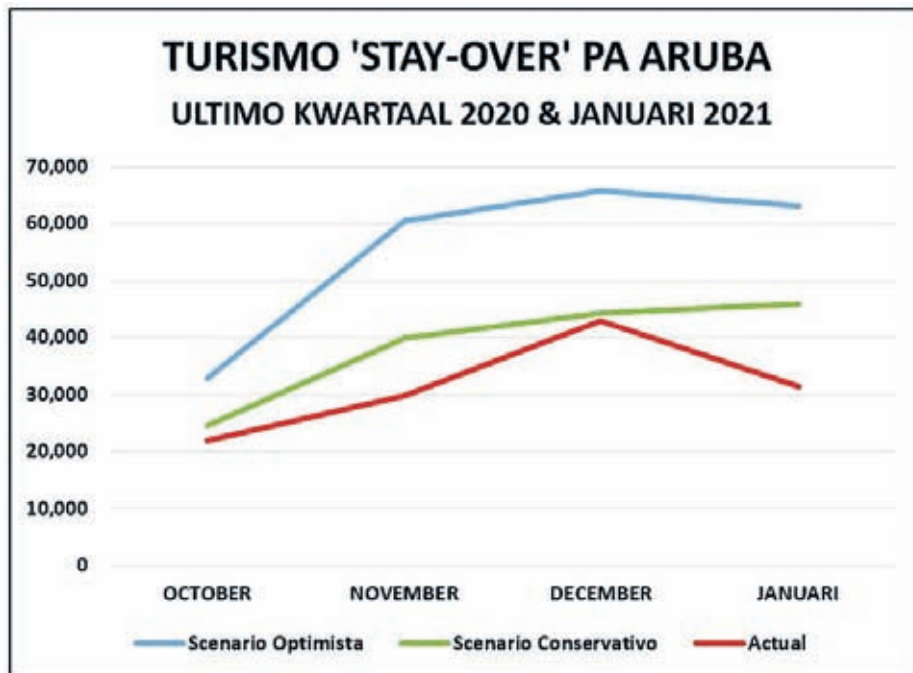




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## Aruba welcomed 31.368 tourists in January: Slow recovery in process



**ORANJESTAD — Aruba Tourism Authority (A.T.A.) informs the community about the latest situation regarding our tourism industry including the most updated figures.**

### Tourism 'stay-over'

During the month of January 2021 our island welcomed a total of 31.368 'stay-over' visitors. Out of this group, 26.860 were coming from the northern part of the US and 1.843 flew in from different European countries. 2.665 tourists were arriving from regional destinations.

### Visitors and accommodations

27.1 % of the visitors stayed in a

high-rise hotel while 6.7 % booked a low-rise resort. 39.9 % were time share resort guests and 26.3 % chose for an alternative accommodation. The age of the majority of the visitors during the month of January was between 20 and 49 years old (15.624 persons) and between 50 and 59 years old (5.923 persons).

### Hotels/Aruba Hotel and Tourism Association (AHATA)

According to AHATA the 'Average Daily Rate' (ADR) in the month of January was 20 % lower than in the same month in 2020. January 2020 showed an ADR of \$ 371.78 while this year the ADR was \$ 297.45 in

January. The RevPAR which is the revenue per available room decreased with 73.9 % from \$ 286.60 in 2020 to \$ 74.70 in 2021. The hotel occupancy shows a decline of 67.4 % in comparison with January 2020, this year's occupancy was 25.1 % in January. The numbers AHATA provides are based on the information from 19 resorts and 6 time share resorts representing the majority of the hotels with the exception of the Hilton Aruba Caribbean Resort & Casino.

### What to expect for the remaining first quarter of 2021?

Based on the different current developments and also by analyzing the aerial transportation status, we can conclude a conservative scenario which is applicable to the first quarter of 2021 and projected for February and March. The scenario pictures a total of 34.000 tourists in February and a total of 42.000 tourist for March. The expected projection for February and March is in line with the conservative scenario concluding that we close this first quarter of 2021 with the conservative outlook.

### Cruise tourism

The cruise industry is paralyzed since the beginning of the pandemic and there is still no concrete date of an operational restart of this sector in the Caribbean. The cruise industry is pending informa-

tion from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on the approved protocol in relation with COVID-19 for the cruise industry. The cruise ships you might observe in Aruba's port are here for a so-called 'warm lay-up' which can be translated as being standby in case of a restart of operations. This activity generates a certain income for Aruba's economy among others because the ships purchase the needed products from our local market. There are no tourists on board of these ships, the ships are manned by a skeleton crew who follow the local and international COVID-19 protocol strictly.

### Tourism credits / Central Bank of Aruba

Informed by the Central Bank of Aruba the 'tourism credits' (previously named 'tourism receipts') for the first six months of 2020 contributed AWG 1.174 million to our economy which is 40 % less compared to the same period in 2019. This of course is due to the worldwide pandemic of COVID-19 where Aruba had to close their borders temporarily from March 2020 to July 2020. Like other destinations our island is experiencing challenging times in regards to the current pandemic. It is important to follow the protocol informed by several organizations because together we can overcome and have our tourism flourish again. □

## Aruba to me

**ORANJESTAD — You are back and we would like to portrait you! By inviting you to send us your favorite vacation picture while enjoying our Happy Island.**

Complete the sentence: Aruba to me is ..... Send your picture with that text (including your name and where you are from) to: news@arubatoday.com and we will publish your vacation memory. Isn't that a special way to keep your best moments alive? Please do note: By submitting photos, text or any other materials, you give permission to The Aruba Today Newspaper, Caribbean Speed Printers and any of its affiliated companies to use said materials, as well as names, likeness, etc. for promotional purposes without compensation.

Last but not least: check out our website, Instagram and Facebook page! Thank you for supporting our free newspaper, we strive to make you a happy reader every day again.

For today we received this great picture from **Maggie Bryk Kinney**. She says:



"Hello Aruba today. My husband and I have been visiting Aruba since 1993. My siblings, husband, and I have been traveling since 2015. We stay at the Hilton, Palm Beach. It's always perfect. The grounds are pristine. The beach is unbelievably beautiful. The service is amazing. We love Aruba. We plan on seeing you again in December 2021. Thank you Aruba! We love you! Bon Bini!" □



## Fruit Loose & Veggie Boost

**ORANJESTAD — Fresh fruit makes a tropical holiday's picture complete. Whether you see the mango's hanging from their branches or the fresh fruit cocktail on the side table of your pool bed, the link is there: you are in the tropics. Aruba grows its own fruits and veggies and there are some pretty out-of-space local species you may never had heard of, but they are very healthy and delicious.**

### Mispel

This is a fruit with a character (5-10 cm/2-4 inches). It does not ripe until it is picked or falls off the tree. Mispel is hard with a sandpaper like texture when immature, soft and juicy when ripe. It's technically a berry, but contains a skin similar to that of a kiwi. It's grainy and sweet, with a light, musky flavor. The sap or gum from the tree is also a source of 'chicle' the original ingredient used to make chewing gum. Rich in tannins, antioxidants shown to contain anti-inflammatory compounds, and vitamin C, essential for

healthy immune function. Season: year-round.

### Kenepa

Ovoid green fruit that grows in bunches on trees up to 30m high. The fruit is related to the lychee and have tight, thin but rigid skins. Inside the skin is the tart, tangy, or sweet pulp of the fruit covering a large seed. The pulp is usually cream or orange colored. Kenepa strengthens the immune system, and prevents the reproduction of bacteria and viruses in the body. This fruit is highly recommended to treat lung infections and urinary tract infections. It also helps to cure insomnia and rejuvenates the nervous system. Season: the fruit typically ripen during the summer.

### Druif

There is no chance you did not bump into one of the sea grape trees while spending your vacation on Aruba. The sea grape plant is often used in ocean-side landscaping in sandy soil right on the beach and it produces clusters of fruit

that resemble grapes. Are sea grapes edible? Yes, they are. Animals enjoy sea grapes and humans can eat them as well, and they are used to make jam. They contain very low calories and sugar, enabling good bacterium to digest food and excrete waste quickly which is effective in preventing constipation. Season: Sep-Oct.

### Tamarind

A delicious, sweet fruit that has a wide variety of uses and applications, both for medicinal and culinary purposes. It is a medium-sized bushy tree with evergreen leaves and fruit that develops in pods characterized by long, brown shells. Inside is a sticky, fleshy, juicy pulp, which is the Tamarind fruit. Both sweet and sour in taste, the fruit contains a significant level of vitamin C, as well as vitamin E, B vitamins, calcium, iron, phosphorous, potassium, manganese, and dietary fiber. There are also a number of organic compounds that make tamarind a powerful antioxidant and anti-in-



flammatory agent. Season: March.

When it comes to veggies the island offers a home-grown selection. They taste delicious and have their specific talents to boost your immune system. Start the day with a 'batida' (smoothie) enriched with a local veggie or select a restaurant that offers local vegetable dishes to get the real pure taste of Aruba.

### Konkomber chiquito

This is a sort of local squash, but looks like a cucumber with prickly skin. The taste however is bitterer than the cucumber and the vegetable is smaller in size but bigger in width. Inside is a soft, fleshy pulp and seeds, just like the cucumber. Konkomber chiquito is grown in the island and used in salads and 'stoba' (stew) or on its own in vinegar. The veggie contains multiple B vitamins, including vitamin B1, vitamin B5, and vitamin B7 (biotin). B vitamins are known to help ease feelings of anxiety and buffer some of the damaging effects of stress. Additionally this veggie is rich in two of the most basic elements needed for healthy digestion: water and fiber. Season: year-round.

### Bonchi' Cunucu

A long, small bean, boiled for a side dish or snack.

Long beans have a chewy, crunchy texture—more so than snap beans—and a flavor reminiscent of the dry navy bean or asparagus. Besides stir-fry, soups and salads, the long bean is a good choice for stewing, braising (to remain chewy and firm), sautéing, shallow frying, and deep frying.

With cooking, the long bean's bean flavor intensifies. Long beans are low in calories, about 45 calories per cup, and rich in vitamin A and also contain vitamin C and potassium. Season: year-round.

### Pompuna

In the endless summer of Caribbean living we only have to concern ourselves with a wet season and a dry season. Still we do indulge heavily in the pleasures of pumpkin and enjoy Caribbean pumpkin recipes year round. A popular dish in Aruban restaurants is Sopa Di Pompuna, don't miss it. This dish is made of pumpkin soup, and parsley.

Pumpkins are rich in flavonoid polyphenolic antioxidants such as xanthin, lutein and carotenes and also contain vitamins. Pumpkin seeds are a good source of omega-3 fatty acids, vitamins, minerals and proteins. Pumpkins are used to make desserts, breads and soups. □





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# Breaking down the tax implications of PPP loans

By **KELSEY SHEEHY**  
of NerdWallet

The approaching tax season is raising fresh questions for business owners who received a loan through the Paycheck Protection Program.

Can you deduct expenses paid with your loan funds? Do you need to do anything differently this year? And if your loan is forgiven, is it considered taxable income?

Answers to these questions have been hard to nail down, in part due to shifting guidance from the IRS. But new rules spelled out in the latest round of coronavirus relief help put an end to the confusion.

"Doing your taxes wasn't easy before COVID," says Keith Hall, president and CEO of the National Association for the Self-Employed. "The good news is this year isn't going to be any harder than tax returns you've had in the past."

## **FORGIVEN PPP LOANS ARE NOT TAXABLE**

"Historically and forever, if you have a business loan and it is forgiven, that automatically is taxable income. It's been in the internal revenue code forever," Hall says.



This Oct. 1, 2020 photo shows a sale sign is posted outside a store in Nashville, Tenn.

Associated Press

Paycheck Protection Program loans break from that code. Congress specified, and the IRS clarified, that forgiven PPP loans will not count as income. This applies whether your entire loan is forgiven or just a portion.

"If it is forgiven, it will not be taxable income. Period," Hall says.

## **YOU CAN DEDUCT EXPENSES PAID WITH A PPP LOAN**

This one has been more of a moving target. Initially,

the IRS' position was this: Expenses paid with PPP loan funds can't be deducted if the loan was or will be forgiven. However, that changed with the coronavirus relief act signed into law on Dec. 27, 2020, which specifies that deductions shouldn't be denied simply due to the loan being forgiven. That means expenses paid with your PPP loan are deductible.

This outcome effectively creates two layers of tax

benefits for PPP loan recipients, says Roshani Pandey, financial advisor and founder of True Root Financial in San Francisco.

"The first benefit is making the loan income-tax-free," Pandey says. "The second is allowing businesses to claim income deductions on expenses paid."

## **BUSINESS TAXES ARE NOT AN ALLOWABLE USE OF PPP FUNDS**

The latest round of coronavirus relief also gives busi-

ness owners more flexibility with how they spend PPP funds. Newly covered costs include protective equipment, property damage and business software.

Business taxes aren't part of that expanded list. So if you use your PPP loan to pay your business taxes, that amount won't be forgiven.

## **YOU CAN STILL CLAIM THE EMPLOYEE RETENTION TAX CREDIT**

Businesses can now claim the Employee Retention Tax Credit if they meet the requirements. There's one important caveat: You can't claim wages paid with a forgiven PPP loan.

You can, however, claim the credit on wages paid above and beyond the amount forgiven.

To qualify for the tax credit, you must continue to pay employees despite being temporarily shut down because of COVID-19 restrictions or suffering a 20% drop in gross receipts compared with the same quarter in the prior year.

These changes were ushered in with the coronavirus relief bill on Dec. 27, 2020, but are retroactive to March 12, 2020. The credit is good on qualified wages paid up to July 1, 2021. □

# GM's Chevy Bolt SUV joins parade of new U.S. electric vehicles

By **TOM KRISHER**  
AP Auto Writer

**DETROIT (AP)** — Whether people want them or not, automakers are rolling out new electric vehicle models as the industry responds to stricter pollution regulations and calls to reduce emissions to fight climate change.

The latest offering comes from General Motors, which unveiled a Chevrolet Bolt compact SUV on Sunday. It comes with an estimated range per charge of 250 miles (400 kilometers) and a \$33,995 starting price tag. The Bolt Electric Utility Vehicle will go on sale early this summer as a 2022 model. Sales will start with a small number of early versions priced at \$43,495.

It will bring the total number of EVs on sale in the U.S. to

at least 23, and Edmunds.com expects that figure to reach 30 this year. About 2.5 million electric vehicles were sold worldwide last year. IHS Markit predicts that will increase 70% this year alone. But the changeover has a long way to go. Fully electric vehicles accounted for less than 2% of U.S. new vehicle sales last year, and Americans continue to spend record amounts on larger gas-powered trucks and SUVs. EVs make up 3% of sales worldwide, GM says. The new Bolt is part of GM's pledge to bring 30 new EVs to market worldwide by 2035, and its goal of producing only electric passenger vehicles in 14 years. It will sit taller and have more rear-seat legroom than the current Bolt electric hatchback, which

is being updated, and will compete in one of the hottest segments of the U.S. market. Buyers also can opt for GM's "Super Cruise" partially automated driver-assist system.

IHS Markit analyst Stephanie Brinley said the new SUV is another step toward wider adoption of fully electric vehicles, but it will take many more.

"At least one element of mainstreaming EVs must be consumer choice and availability of usable EVs in a variety of segments and price points," she said. "Some will have more impact than others, but there isn't one vehicle alone that can turn the tide."

The Bolt SUV will come out when GM is at a price disadvantage to most competitors due to a \$7,500



The 2022 Bolt EV, foreground, and EUV are displayed, Thursday, Feb. 11, 2021, in Milford, Mich.

Associated Press

federal EV tax credit. The credit is phased out after manufacturers hit 200,000 in electric vehicle sales, and GM and Tesla have both passed that level. A bill from Democrats on the House Ways and Means Committee would raise the cap to 600,000 and cut the

credit to \$7,000.

A White House spokesman said President Joe Biden favors restoring the full tax credit, prioritizing U.S.-made vehicles and targeting middle-class consumers. The spokesman wouldn't comment on the sales cap. □



# In Nevada desert, a technology firm aims to be a government



This undated illustration provided by Blockchains LLC shows a proposed "smart city" in rural northern Nevada.

Associated Press

By SAM METZ

Associated Press/Report for America

CARSON CITY, Nev. (AP)

— In the Nevada desert, a cryptocurrency magnate hopes to turn dreams of a futuristic "smart city" into reality. To do that, he's asking the state to let companies like his form local governments on land they own, which would grant them power over everything from schools to law enforcement.

Jeffrey Berns, CEO of Nevada-based Blockchains LLC, envisions a city where people not only purchase goods and services with digital currency but also log their entire online footprint — financial statements, medical records and personal data — on blockchain. Blockchain is a digital ledger known mostly for recording cryptocurrency transactions but also has been adopted by some local governments for everything from documenting marriage licenses to facilitating elections.

The company wants to break ground by 2022 in rural Storey County, 12 miles (19 kilometers) east of Reno. It's proposing to build 15,000 homes and 33 million square feet (3 million square

meters) of commercial and industrial space within 75 years. Berns, whose idea is the basis for draft legislation that some lawmakers saw behind closed doors last week, said traditional government doesn't offer enough flexibility to create a community where people can invent new uses for this technology.

"There's got to be a place somewhere on this planet where people are willing to just start from scratch and say, 'We're not going to do things this way just because it's the way we've done it,'" Berns said.

He wants Nevada to change its laws to allow "innovation zones," where companies would have powers like those of a county government, including creating court systems, imposing taxes and building infrastructure while making land and water management decisions.

The prospect has been met with intrigue and skepticism from Nevada lawmakers, though the legislation has yet to be formally filed or discussed in public hearings. Most in the Democratic-controlled Legislature are eager to diversify Nevada's tourism-dependent economy, but many fear

backlash against business incentives as they struggle to fund health care and education.

This proposal differs from the big tax rebates they have grown wary of offering, like the \$1.3 billion given to Tesla to build its northern Nevada battery factory or the billions New York and Virginia offered Amazon to build new corporate headquarters.

But it raises deeper issues about increasing tech companies' grip on everyday life at a time when antitrust regulators and Democrats in Congress allege tech giants like Facebook and Google are controlling markets and endangering people's privacy.

Blockchains LLC and so-called innovation zones were a key part of Gov. Steve Sisolak's January State of the State address, when he outlined plans to rebuild a more diversified economy after the coronavirus pandemic.

Sisolak, whose campaign and affiliated political action committee received a combined \$60,000 from the company, said the proposal would transform Nevada into "the epicenter of this emerging industry and create the high-paying jobs

and revenue that go with it."

The governor's office declined to comment further on innovation zones. But with Sisolak's backing, the idea could garner serious consideration in the Legislature.

"I don't know enough yet to say whether I'm comfortable with this as the next step or not. But, look, it's a big idea and Nevada has been built on big ideas, so let's hear it out," said state Sen. Ben Kieckhefer, a Republican who sponsored blockchain-related legislation in 2017 and 2019.

If lawmakers back the proposal, technology companies with 50,000 acres of land (200 square kilometers) that promise a \$1 billion investment could create zones governed by three people like county commissioners. The draft legislation says two of them initially would be from the company itself.

In Storey County, which is home to Tesla's factory, officials are waiting for more information before offering opinions but say questions still need to be answered.

Commissioner Lance Gilman, who owns the Mustang Ranch brothel and bought most of the county's

land to turn it into an industrial park decades ago, has supported luring technology companies to the area and growing its population. But Gilman, who worked in marketing for Blockchains LLC from 2018 to 2019, said there are many unknowns about ceding control to a new jurisdiction that falls within county borders.

"(The bill) wants the host county to let it form, become successful, not pay them very much money, and eventually let them take over the whole county and all the operations, if it becomes successful," Gilman said. "If it doesn't become successful, who becomes responsible for all the stuff that was built in the meantime?"

The county's master plan doesn't permit residential development in the Tahoe-Reno Industrial Center, where most of Blockchain LLC's property lies, but it allows for 3,500 homes in Painted Rock, a subsection of the company's 67,000 acres (271 square kilometers).

Berns said officials told him in an informal discussion two years ago that they weren't interested in zoning for more homes, a meeting that former County Manager Pat Whitten confirmed. Berns understands that elected leaders in Storey County may not want an experimental city in their backyard but believes the idea should be a state decision because of its potential to "singularly define Nevada going forward."

"We bought 70,000 acres of land in the county. What did they think we were going to do?" he said.

The former consumer protection attorney said the idea was born from how he sees government as an unnecessary middleman between people and ideas.

"For us to be able to take risks and be limber, nimble and figure things out like you do when you're designing new products, that's not how government works. So why not let us just create a government that lets us do those things?" Berns said. □





This photo provided by the Egyptian Antiquities Ministry on Saturday, Feb. 13, 2021 show a pottery basin, which archaeologists say had been used to heat up a mixture of grains and water to produce beer, in Abydos, some 450 km (280 miles) south of Cairo, Egypt.

By **SAMY MAGDY**  
**Associated Press**

**CAIRO (AP)** — American and Egyptian archaeologists have unearthed what could be the oldest known beer factory at one of the most prominent archaeological sites of ancient Egypt, a top antiquities official said Saturday.

Mostafa Waziri, secretary general of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, said the factory was found in Abydos, an ancient burial ground located in the desert west of the Nile River, over 450 kilometers (280 miles) south of Cairo.

He said the factory apparently dates back to the region of King Narmer, who is widely known for his unification of ancient Egypt at the beginning of the First Dynastic Period (3150 B.C.-2613 B.C.).

Archaeologists found eight huge units — each is 20 meters (about 65 feet) long and 2.5 meters (about 8 feet) wide. Each unit includes some 40 pottery basins in two rows, which had been used to heat up a mixture of grains and water to produce beer, Waziri said.

The joint mission is co-chaired by Dr. Matthew Adams of the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, and Deborah Vischak, assistant professor of ancient Egyptian art history and archaeology at Princeton University.

Adams said the factory was apparently built in this area to provide royal rituals with beer, given that archaeologists found evi-

**Associated Press**

dences showing the use of beer in sacrificial rites of ancient Egyptians.

British archaeologists were the first to mention the existence of that factory early

## Egypt: Archaeologists unearth ancient beer factory in Abydos

1900s, but they couldn't determine its location, the antiquities ministry said.

With its vast cemeteries and temples from the earliest times of ancient Egypt, Abydos was known for monuments honoring Osiris, ancient Egypt's god of underworld and the deity responsible for judging souls in the afterlife.

The necropolis had been used in every period of early Egyptian history, from the prehistoric age to Roman times.

Egypt has announced dozens of ancient discoveries in the past couple of years, in the hope of attracting

more tourists. □

### Casa del Mar 2BR/2B

Week 2/1113 (16k);  
Week 5/1315 (18k);  
Week 5&6/1521 (20k/Wk.);  
Week 7&8/1408 (18k/Wk.);  
Week 8/1113; 8/1409 (17k/Wk.);  
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## Conceptis Sudoku

By Dave Green

1	9				7	6		4
6		3		8			7	
	7		6					9
		5	3					2
	8						4	
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Difficulty Level ★

2/15

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Police Tipline	11141
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Red Cross	582 2219

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Alcoholics Anonymous  
Tel. 736 2952

Narcotics Anonymous  
Tel. 583 8989

Fundacion Contra Violencia  
Relacional Tel. 583 5400

Centre for Diabetes  
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Child Abuse Prevention  
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# For her directorial debut, Robin Wright found ‘Land’

By LINDSEY BAHR  
AP Film Writer

Robin Wright used to joke that her directorial debut had already been made. It was called “Blue Valentine,” it starred Michelle Williams and Ryan Gosling as a couple falling apart, it came out in 2010 and it was directed by Derek Cianfrance, not her. And she’d always assumed that hers would eventually be in that vein, but then “Land” fell into her lap a few years ago.

The film, which is now in theaters from Focus Features, finds a successful Chicago woman leaving her life behind after a horrifying tragedy for a solitary existence in the mountains of Wyoming.

Wright had been dreaming of directing for a while. She can’t exactly pinpoint when it started in her almost four decades in the entertainment business, but the itch would come up every now and then, when she’d see a director unable to reach actors in the right way or just have a clearer vision for how something should be shot. She always backed away, thinking she wasn’t ready. Then, six seasons into “House of Cards,” she stepped up and got her own on-the-job training. When “Land” came to her, she said, it was at a time when there seemed to be mass shootings almost every week. And this script resonated in a way that none had before, from



This image released by Focus Features shows actor-director Robin Wright, left, and director of photography Bobby Bukowski on the set of “Land.”

the reason Wright’s Edee leaves her life to the way she starts to heal. “The beauty of human kindness that this movie has, that we all do need each other and we need someone to pull us out of difficult times and guide us through. I just feel like that message needed to be told,” Wright said. She’d never intended to play Edee either, but nothing was lining up with the other actors she was considering and suddenly they had the financing and a start date and no lead. “We couldn’t take the risk of would we have it cast in time?” Wright said. “We shot the movie in 29 days so we really couldn’t mess

around.” Her producers gently suggested that she consider it. “I said, yep, I’m going to be there anyway!” Wright laughed. For her counterpart, Miguel, Wright cast the Oscar-nominated Mexican American actor Demián Bichir. She’d been taken by his turns in “A Better Life” and “The Hateful Eight” and was excited that he seemed to be both thoughtful and funny. “Land,” she knew, needed some levity. But it was sealed when they met. They were kindred spirits. “He walked in the house and it was like we had known each other our whole life. It’s the exact dynamic that you see on

screen,” she said. “We were like each other’s long lost sibling.” Bichir said he just wanted to be part of it, “whether it was playing Miguel or being her assistant.” He’d had his own devastating loss recently. His wife, Stefanie Sherk, had died by suicide earlier in the year. “He said, ‘One day I will share with you my story. But I need to do this movie. It’s therapy for me,’” Wright said. They set off to Alberta, Canada, in September 2019 to film a story that takes place over multiple seasons in multiple years. It would be an understatement to say that the weather was unpredictable, even for Alberta. Every day they

were prepared with three different wardrobes, just in case the weather took a turn. “It’s the first film that I’ve ever made that was scheduled by nature,” Bichir laughed. But Wright had some seasoned locals on her crew who were more reliable than any app. She called them her “Calgary weather whisperers.” The “film angels” were on their side, too, delivering unseasonably early snow at the perfect moment and then transitioning back to autumn. And everyone was committed, especially cinematographer Bobby Bukowski, a naturally outdoorsy spirit who went above and beyond to get spectacular shots of nature. “The producer and I, we slept in trailers right behind the cabin. But he chose to sleep in the freezing cold cabin with all the rodents that lived in there so he could capture those amazing shots, those vista shots, all of the weather, the rain and the snow at night, the moon time lapse,” Wright said. “That was just him waking up at 2, 3, 4 in the morning to catch something.” Bichir, who has also directed, was in awe of Wright’s skills. “She’s as great as she is as an actor,” he said. “She knows exactly what she wants. She is just a natural captain, you know? She’s a great commander in chief.”

Associated Press

# MTA brings celebrity voices to NYC transit announcements



This photo from Monday, Aug. 17, 2020, shows riders on a subway train wearing protective masks due to COVID-19 concerns in New York.

Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Riders on New York City subways and buses are getting an earful, thanks to some famous hometown voices. The Metropolitan Transportation Authority on Friday launched a campaign that has celebrities including Jerry Seinfeld, Whoopi Goldberg and Awkwafina making the announcements heard at subway stations, on trains and buses. The MTA said the announcements will run for at least a month, and

highlight the importance of mask-wearing and other coronavirus pandemic safety measures. “As we start to look beyond the pandemic, we hope this new set of announcements will remind our customers of what makes New York so special,” said interim New York City Transit president Sarah Feinberg in a statement. The scripts were written in a collaboration between the MTA and Nico Heller, better known under his so-

cial media personality of @newyorknico, and the celebrities were encouraged to put their own takes on them as well, the MTA said.

1	9	8	2	5	7	6	3	4
6	2	3	4	8	9	1	7	5
5	7	4	6	3	1	2	8	9
7	1	5	3	4	8	9	6	2
2	8	9	5	1	6	3	4	7
4	3	6	7	9	2	5	1	8
9	6	7	8	2	3	4	5	1
3	4	1	9	7	5	8	2	6
8	5	2	1	6	4	7	9	3



# Like a legend: Kriechmayr wins 2 speed golds at ski worlds

By ERIC WILLEMSEN

Associated Press

**CORTINA D'AMPEZZO, Italy**

(AP) — Hermann Maier. Bode Miller. Vincent Kriechmayr.

A feat previously achieved only by two legends of men's Alpine skiing was matched by Austrian skier Kriechmayr at the world championships on Sunday. Kriechmayr added downhill gold to the super-G title he won three days ago to complete the so-called speed double.

Fellow Austrian Maier had done the same in 1999, American standout Miller six years later.

"Hermann Maier is an Austrian legend and Bode Miller is a legend, too. To be on the same step is really amazing," Kriechmayr said. "I don't compare myself to Hermann or Bode Miller, they were also Olympic and World Cup overall champions," said the Austrian, adding it would take time to sink in.

"I'm rather someone who enjoys this quietly, who reflects on it later."

By winning the most important downhill of the season, Kriechmayr presented the outgoing president of the Austrian winter sports federation with an ideal gift.

For Peter Schröcksnadel, who is expected to step down in June after 31 years, no races are more important than the downhills at the major championships. "Downhill gold is what's the



**Austria's Vincent Kriechmayr speeds down the course on his way to win the men's downhill, at the alpine ski World Championships in Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy, Sunday, Feb. 14, 2021.**

Associated Press

most important in Austria," Schröcksnadel said.

The race against the backdrop of snow-covered peaks in the Italian Dolomites lived up to its billing as one of the most eye-catching downhills of the season, with spectacular crashes, faltering favorites, a surprise medalist, and the smallest possible winning margin.

Kriechmayr edged Andreas Sander of Germany to the gold by one-hundredth of a second, with 2017 world champion Beat Feuz finishing 0.18 behind for the bronze.

Sander earned the German team its third silver medal at these worlds, after second-place finishes for Romed Baumann in

super-G and Kira Weidle in women's downhill.

"It's a mega feeling," Sander said. "We have a great atmosphere in the team after Romed got silver and Kira as well."

Baumann was in the spotlight again right after he finished Sunday's race but this time for a nasty fall, sliding skis first into the protective banners and completely disappearing beneath them.

Freed by coaches and officials, he came out with blood on his face and race suit.

German ski federation sports director Wolfgang Maier said Baumann sustained a cut on his face but escaped serious injuries.

In another frightening incident, Maxence Muzaton avoided a serious crash when he caught a bump and fell head-first after losing control over his right ski at 120 kph (75 mph).

The Frenchman used an acrobatic recovery as he turned around and got upright while skiing backwards before coming to a standstill.

Kriechmayr avoided similarly spectacular scenes when he opened the race and found the quickest way through a passage that included — untypically for a downhill — six sharp turns.

Sander started second and soon lost three-tenths on Kriechmayr but the Ger-

man racer was faster on the bottom part.

Only one of the remaining 40 starters came even close to the leading pair but Feuz ultimately trailed by 0.18 for bronze.

The rest of the field, led by Italian home favorite Dominik Paris and Swiss skier Marco Odermatt who shared fourth position, was at least 0.65 off the lead.

Tied for 10th, Bryce Bennett led the American team — followed by Travis Ganong in 12th.

Aleksander Aamodt Kilde, the overall World Cup champion, is out for the season with a knee injury.

The turning section that decided the race had been sharply criticized by many racers after the first official training session on Friday.

Organizers reset those gates to make the course slightly more fluent, but many downhillers still struggled.

It didn't matter to Kriechmayr, though.

"It's a lot of turns but Kitzbühel and Wengen also have such turns that usually nobody would set for a downhill," he added. "It's not a typical downhill, but it doesn't matter to me on what course I win."

The race was interrupted when Florian Schieder was thrown off the bumpy course midway through his run.

The Italian was hospitalized with a suspected rupture of his left knee ligaments. □

## Justin Turner returning to World Series champion Dodgers

**LOS ANGELES (AP)** — Justin Turner is returning to the Los Angeles Dodgers, announcing via Twitter on Saturday night that he's ready to "run it back" with the World Series champions after agreeing to a \$34 million, two-year deal.

The 36-year-old third baseman batted .307 with four homers, 23 RBIs and an .860 OPS during the pandemic-shortened 2020 season.

Turner's contract includes a club option for a third year that could raise the value to \$48 million over three years. He will receive

an \$8 million signing bonus and can earn up to an additional \$4 million in performance bonuses.

The red-headed slugger hit .320 with two homers during the World Series before being pulled from the deciding Game 6 after testing positive for the coronavirus. He infamously broke protocol by returning to the field after the final out and removed his mask near teammates during the celebration. MLB decided against punishing him.

Turner became a free agent when his \$64 mil-

lion, four-year deal with the Dodgers expired after the World Series. He earned a prorated \$7,037,037 of his \$19 million salary in 2020.

A late-bloomer after overhauling his swing in his late 20s, Turner has been an anchor in the Dodgers' lineup for most of their eight straight NL West titles. He hit .302 with 116 homers over seven seasons in Los Angeles.

The Dodgers are set to bring back essentially the same team that won the 2020 title — along with NL Cy Young Award winner



**In this Oct. 24, 2020, file photo, Los Angeles Dodgers' Justin Turner hits a home run against the Tampa Bay Rays during the first inning in Game 4 of the baseball World Series in Arlington, Texas.**

Associated Press

Trevor Bauer, who signed a \$102 million, three-year

deal with Los Angeles this week. □





## Down but not out, Serena Williams into Australian Open QFs

**MELBOURNE, Australia (AP)** — **Serena Williams tumbled to the ground, her heavily taped right ankle turning, her body contorting, her racket flying.**

This was early in the second set of a competitive-as-can-be matchup in the Australian Open's fourth round against a younger version of herself — stinging serves, huge groundstroke cuts, a fierce streak — and during a stretch Sunday (Saturday night EST) when things seemed to be slipping away.

Williams quickly put up a hand to indicate she was OK, retied the laces of her right shoe and, while it took her a bit to regain control, she did so, just in the nick of time. Grabbing the last two games, Williams pulled out 6-4, 2-6, 6-4 victory over No. 7 seed Aryna Sabalenka to reach the quarterfinals at Melbourne Park.

Two years ago at this tournament, Williams was on the verge of a quarterfinal win when she hurt her ankle and ended up losing.

"Well, my first thought was, 'Not another ankle sprain in Australia.' But I knew immediately that it wasn't. Then I was more embarrassed than anything. I was like, 'Oh, my goodness.' I don't like falling," Williams said. "But I was fine. I mean, once I realized I didn't twist my ankle, like at all, I was like, 'OK, I'm good, let me just get up.'"

Williams, who wore a black T-shirt with "Unstoppable Queen" in capital gold letters to her news conference, moved closer to an eighth Australian Open championship and record-tying 24th Grand Slam singles title overall.

Her most recent came in 2017, while she was pregnant.

On a cloudy day with the



**United States' Serena Williams falls during her fourth round match against Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus at the Australian Open tennis championship in Melbourne, Australia, Sunday, Feb. 14, 2021.**

temperature in the mid-60s Fahrenheit (high teens Celsius), both Williams and Sabalenka dismissed much in the way of subtlety or nuance.

"I was OK with it, really," Williams said. "If she wants to play power, let's go."

These two hit the ball hard, over and over again in Rod Laver Arena, and Williams was barely better. She ended up with more winners, 30-24, and more aces, 9-4, while cranking up her best-in-the-game serve to as fast as 126 mph (202 kph). When Williams needed to volley, she did, claiming 13 of 15 points when she went to the net. More importantly, she covered the court much in the way she did in her younger days, when opponents' apparent winners were rendered mere fodder for her own strikes.

And she showed no signs of trouble from the left Achilles tendon that hampered her in a U.S. Open semifinal loss in September and forced her to withdraw

from the French Open before the second round later that month.

"I've worked really hard on my movement. Yeah, I like retrieving balls. I mean, obviously I like to be on the offense, but I can play defense really well, as well," the 39-year-old American said. "I didn't think about my Achilles. It's so good to not think about it. Oh, my goodness."

Sabalenka — a 22-year-old from Belarus playing in only her second fourth-round Slam match — was visibly and audibly frustrated. She frequently would scream after lost points. She spiked her racket, too.

With the high quality of the match, the only shame was that no fans were there to see it in person. That's because this was Day 2 of the five-day lockdown imposed by the Victoria state government after some COVID-19 cases emerged at a local hotel. (Any cheering or chatter TV viewers heard at home was being

pipled in to broadcasters' feeds).

Williams now faces No. 2-ranked Simona Halep, a two-time major winner who beat French Open champion Iga Swiatek 3-6, 6-1, 6-4. The other quarterfinal on that half of the draw will be Naomi Osaka against unseeded 35-year-old Hsieh Su-wei of Taiwan.

Eight-time Australian Open champion Novak Djokovic shrugged off a side muscle injury to beat Milos Raonic 7-6 (4), 4-6, 6-1, 6-4 in a night match and register his 300th win in a Grand Slam match.

Top-ranked Djokovic joined Roger Federer as the only men to achieve the milestone.

He hurt a stomach muscle when he fell during his third-round victory over Taylor Fritz and there were concerns he wouldn't recover in time to play Raonic. But he competed fully for almost three hours. He was wearing tape above his right hip and later said if

he wasn't playing a major, he'd probably already have withdrawn from the event.

His quarterfinal will be against U.S. Open finalist Alexander Zverev, who beat No. 23-seeded Dusan Lajovic 6-4, 7-6 (5), 6-3.

There were two significant surprises in men's fourth-round action.

Dominic Thiem — the Australian Open runner-up and U.S. Open champion in 2020 — looked physically compromised in a 6-4, 6-4, 6-0 loss to three-time major semifinalist Grigor Dimitrov. Even more unexpected: Dimitrov's next opponent is Aslan Karatsev, a 27-year-old Russian qualifier who is ranked 114th and the first player since 1996 to reach the quarterfinals in his Grand Slam debut. Karatsev eliminated 20th-seeded Felix Auger-Aliassime 3-6, 1-6, 6-3, 6-3, 6-4.

Osaka barely advanced, saving two match points and grabbing the last four games to top Garbiñe Muguruza 4-6, 6-4, 7-5.

The third-seeded Osaka returns to the quarterfinals of a tournament she won in 2019 for one of her three major trophies. Osaka ran her winning streak to 18 matches — a run that included a U.S. Open title in September.

"She's playing great. Big shots, big serve," Muguruza said. "That gives her a lot of free points."

The key moment came when Osaka was serving at 15-40 while trailing 5-3 in the final set. Muguruza could not convert either chance to end things: Osaka delivered one of her 11 aces at 118 mph (191 kph) on the first; Muguruza missed a groundstroke on the second.

Fifteen minutes later, the match was over. □